

## Returning to Our First Love - Revelation 2:1-7

*But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first.  
Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.*

Revelation 2:4-5

The book of Revelation is most famous for its gripping depictions of end-time events. But near the beginning of this book we find an often-overlooked section. It records seven letters from Jesus to seven churches in a region of Europe then known as Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Although the letters deal with challenges facing those churches 2,000 years ago, they are also relevant for every believer in every age. We know this because in each letter Jesus says, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The first of these letters is addressed to the church in Ephesus, and it exposes a problem nearly everyone understands: love growing cold. “I have this against you,” Jesus writes, “that you have abandoned the love you had at first.” In studying this letter, we should be willing to admit not only that we *could* abandon our first love, but also that we *have* abandoned our first love. So what does Jesus say to believers who have abandoned their first love? He gives:

**I. COMMENDATION:** what they’re doing well; **II. REBUKE:** where they’ve gone wrong; **III. REMEDY:** how to make it right.

### **I. Commendation (2:2-3, 6)**

- A. He commends their *determination* and *discernment*. The believers in this church were the sort of people who would stay up late working on ministry projects, volunteering in soup kitchens, and signing up for courses on theology. They knew their Bibles well enough to tell the difference between a true and false teaching. “I know your works,” Jesus writes, “your toil, and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil.”
- B. His commendation is *sincere*. Jesus was not giving them a “compliment sandwich,” giving two nice compliments with a criticism in the middle to make it easier to swallow. Rather, determination and discernment are qualities that Jesus sincerely values in his people.
- C. His commendation is *nuanced*. When we know someone has done wrong, we have a hard time sorting out their good qualities from their bad ones. We tend to write them off completely, when in fact they are a mix of bad and good qualities. Jesus does not do that: he is *nuanced* in his commendation. He comes with a sharp sword to divide the good from the bad, not a club to smash everything.

### **II. Rebuke (2:4)**

- A. What his rebuke was *not* about

Jesus did not rebuke them for being lazy, or for abandoning right doctrine, or even for “falling in love” with someone else. This teaches us that it is possible for us to do a lot of good things and believe the right things, but still be in danger of ceasing to be a church (“I will remove your lampstand from its place unless you repent,” 2:5).

- B. What his rebuke *was* about

Jesus’ rebuke was not about the *object* of their love, but about the *quality* of their love. They had declined from the love they had when they first trusted him. Although they continued to do and believe the right things, their love lacked freshness. It had turned stale.

1. How does love for Jesus turn stale? Here are four common ways: (a) Love turns stale when I seek relational assurance based on how well I'm doing. (b) Love turns stale when I carve out spaces for sin in my life. (c) Love turns stale when I isolate myself from others. (d) Love turns stale when I allow a personal disappointment to determine my view of God.
2. What does it *look like* when love for Jesus turns stale? A person whose love has grown "stale" might be: (a) too busy to spend time in sustained, quiet prayer; (b) often thinking about how wrong or misguided others are—whether a fellow Christian, a politician, or "those people," whoever they are; (c) surprised to the point of disbelief when someone points out a flaw in their life; (d) interested in learning and sharing the Bible, but unable to make personal life applications.

### III. Remedy (2:5)

To those who had abandoned their first love, Jesus says: "Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first." The remedy assumes that they had at some point loved Jesus in a certain way. Jesus does not tell them to seek ways to intensify their emotional experience of him. This would be like trying to fix a car's problem by getting new tires, when the problem is really in the engine. The remedy involves three steps, to be followed in chronological order:

1. **Remember.** They are to bring to mind what originally drew them to Christ. What about him was so stunning and magnificent? What pierced their resistance and melted their hearts?
2. **Repent.** To repent means to change one's mind about something. To repent means to turn oneself toward Jesus, and away from whatever else had captured one's delight.
3. **Do.** Perhaps someone would object and say that their schedule is already packed, that the calendar is already full. "I'm already busy serving you, Jesus. What *more* do you want me to do?" Maybe Jesus' reply would be like his answer to Martha, when she was bustling around the kitchen. "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary" (Luke 10:41-42). That "one thing" was simple devotion to Jesus.

### Discussion

1. How do you personally relate to the idea of love for Jesus growing cold? Have you ever experienced it? If so, can you share your experience?
2. Think back to a time when you first trusted Christ, or, at least, when your love was fresh and vibrant. What factors contributed to that freshness?
3. As modern Westerners, we see a close relationship between love and emotions, and therefore tend to equate "love" with heightened emotions. What is the role of emotions when it comes to our love for Christ? How can it be dangerous to over-emphasize or de-emphasize emotions?
4. What role do you think community and fellowship with other believers play in preventing our love for Jesus from growing stale? How can we foster meaningful connections in our faith communities?
5. Consider how busy your life is. Are there specific commitments or activities that may be hindering your ability to prioritize your relationship with Jesus? How can you address these challenges?
6. Can you share any practical insights or spiritual disciplines that have helped you return to your first love when you've felt it waning?